

IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently amended): A process for distillatively separating a mixture comprising a vinyl ether of the general formula (I)



and alcohol of the general formula (II)



~~in which~~ wherein

$R^1$  and  $R^2$  are each independently a  $C_2$ - $C_4$ -alkyl radical, and ~~in which~~  
the alcohol (II) has a boiling point which is at least  $1^\circ\text{C}$  higher, measured at or extrapolated to 0.1 MPa abs, than the vinyl ether (II), ~~which comprises~~ comprising:

- a) passing the mixture into a first distillation column and withdrawing, as a top product, an azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) and, as a bottom product, a stream enriched with the alcohol (II);
- b) passing the azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) from the first distillation column into a second distillation column which is operated at a pressure which is from 0.01 to 3 MPa higher compared to the first distillation column, and withdrawing, as a bottom product or gaseous sidestream in ~~the~~ a stripping section, the vinyl ether (I) and, as a top product, an azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II); and
- c) recycling the azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) from the second distillation column into the first distillation column.

Claim 2 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 1, wherein a pressure in the second distillation column ~~is operated at a pressure~~, measured at the top of the column, ~~which~~ is from 0.1 to 2 MPa higher than the first distillation column.

Claim 3 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 1, wherein a temperature in the first distillation column is ~~operated at a temperature of~~ from 75 to 225°C, measured in the bottom of the column, and  
a pressure in the first distillation column is ~~[[of]]~~ from 0.01 to 1 MPa abs, measured at the top of the column.

Claim 4 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 1, wherein a temperature in the second distillation column is ~~operated at a temperature of~~ from 75 to 225°C, measured in the bottom of the column.

Claim 5 (Currently amended): ~~The process according to claim 1,~~ A process for distillatively separating a mixture comprising a vinyl ether of the general formula (I)



and alcohol of the general formula (II)



wherein

R<sup>1</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> are each independently a C<sub>2</sub>-C<sub>4</sub>-alkyl radical, and

the alcohol (II) has a boiling point which is at least 1°C higher, measured at or extrapolated to 0.1 MPa abs, than the vinyl ether (II), comprising:

a) passing the mixture into a first distillation column and withdrawing, as a top product, an azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) and, as a bottom product, a stream enriched with the alcohol (II);

b) passing the azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) from the first distillation column into a second distillation column which is operated at a pressure which is from 0.01 to 3 MPa higher compared to the first distillation column, and withdrawing the vinyl ether, as a gaseous sidestream in a stripping section of the second distillation column in a region of the lower 25% of a total number of theoretical plates, and, as a top product, an azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II); and

c) recycling the azeotrope comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) from the second distillation column into the first distillation column

~~wherein the vinyl ether (I) is withdrawn as a gaseous sidestream in the stripping section of the second distillation column in the region of the lower 25% of the total number of theoretical plates.~~

Claim 6 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 1, ~~wherein~~ further comprising:

passing the vinyl ether (I) withdrawn from the second distillation column as a bottom product or gaseous sidestream in the stripping section is passed into a purifying distillation column and

obtaining the purified vinyl ether (I) is obtained therefrom from the purifying distillation column as a top product.

Claim 7 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 1, wherein ~~a mixture comprising vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) is used in which~~ the R<sup>1</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> radicals are identical.

Claim 8 (Currently amended): The process according to claim 7, further comprising: distillatively removing low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column and

recycling the purified alcohol (II) to a vinyl ether (I) synthesis

wherein ~~the mixture used which comprises vinyl ether (I) and alcohol (II) stems from the vinyl ether (I) synthesis~~ comprises: by

reacting the alcohol (II) with an ethyne in the presence of a basic alkali metal or alkaline earth metal compound[[,]]

~~distillatively removing low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column and recycling the purified alcohol (II) back to the vinyl ether synthesis.~~

Claim 9 (Original): The process according to claim 8, wherein the distillative removal of low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column is carried out in a dividing wall column or an arrangement of distillation columns having heat and/or mass transfer.

Claim 10 (New): The process according to Claim 5, further comprising:  
passing the vinyl ether (I) withdrawn from the second distillation column as gaseous sidestream in the stripping section into a purifying distillation column and

obtaining the purified vinyl ether (I) from the purifying distillation column as a top product.

Claim 11 (New): The process according to Claim 5, wherein the R<sup>1</sup> and R<sup>2</sup> radicals are identical.

Claim 12 (New): The process according to Claim 11, further comprising:  
distillatively removing low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column and  
recycling the purified alcohol (II) to a vinyl ether (I) synthesis  
wherein the vinyl ether (I) synthesis comprises:  
reacting the alcohol (II) with an ethyne in the presence of a basic alkali metal or alkaline earth metal compound.

Claim 13 (New): The process according to claim 12, wherein the distillative removal of low boilers and high boilers from the bottom product enriched with the alcohol (II) in the first distillation column is carried out in a dividing wall column or an arrangement of distillation columns having heat and/or mass transfer.

Claim 14 (New): The process according to Claim 7, wherein the vinyl ether and the vinyl alcohol respectively are selected from the group consisting of ethyl vinyl ether and ethanol, 1-propyl vinyl ether and 1-propanol, 2-propyl vinyl ether and 2-propanol, 1-butyl vinyl ether and 1-butanol, 2-butyl vinyl ether and 2-butanol, isobutyl vinyl ether and isobutanol and tert-butyl vinyl ether and tert-butanol.

Claim 15 (New): The process according to Claim 11, wherein the vinyl ether and the vinyl alcohol respectively are selected from the group consisting of ethyl vinyl ether and ethanol, 1-propyl vinyl ether and 1-propanol, 2-propyl vinyl ether and 2-propanol, 1-butyl vinyl ether and 1-butanol, 2-butyl vinyl ether and 2-butanol, isobutyl vinyl ether and isobutanol and tert-butyl vinyl ether and tert-butanol.